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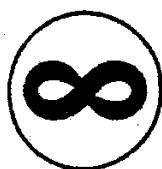
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# Agathangelos

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Of all the historical works written in classical Armenian, that attributed to a certain "Agathangelos" (Agat'angelos) is the most complicated. The complication is of two kinds: internal and external. This *History of the Armenians* is an attempt to bring order to a variety of traditions concerning the political events of the third century A.D. and the conversion of Armenia to Christianity. But the text as we have it is not the first witness to these traditions. An earlier Armenian text, now lost, lies behind versions in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic. Still other versions in Greek, Arabic, and other languages derive from the extant Armenian. No other Armenian story was so well known in other Christian literatures.

The great importance of the surviving Armenian text is that it became the standard version of the life of Saint Gregory the Illuminator for later Armenian tradition. So before analyzing the author's sources and motives, we may here give a brief summary of the story.

Agathangelos' *History* begins with the revolution in Iran that brought Artashir and the Sasanian dynasty to power in A.D. 224. Since the Armenian king, whom Agathangelos calls Khosrov, was related to the deposed Parthian Arsacid royal line, war between Armenia and Iran was an inevitable result. But only after Khosrov had been murdered by a renegade Parthian, Anak, could the Persians finally occupy Armenia.

Agathangelos makes no attempt to place these events in the wider sphere of the Iranian-Roman warfare of the third century A.D. Rather, the death of Khosrov serves him as an opportunity to introduce Trdat (Tiridates in Greek), who is later to become the first Christian king of Armenia, and Gregory, who is to be the instrument of that conversion. For Trdat, son of Khosrov, was taken for safety to Roman territory, there to gain a reputation for martial exploits, while Gregory, the son of Anak (who had been put to death by the Armenians immediately after the

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murder of Khosrov), was brought up in Caesarea in Cappadocia as a Christian.

Eventually an unnamed Roman emperor (identified with Diocletian in later Armenian tradition since he does appear later in this *History*) restored Trdat to the throne of Armenia. Gregory returned there with Trdat, but when he refused to join in worship to the goddess Anahit he was tortured. Trdat discovered that he was the son of his father's murderer and had him cast into a deep dungeon from which no one had ever emerged alive.

Agathangelos now abruptly introduces Diocletian, although more than a decade has elapsed since Gregory's incarceration. In his search for a wife the emperor's attention had been caught by a young woman in Rome, the nun Rhipsimé. Fleeing a fate worse than death, Rhipsimé escaped with numerous companions to Armenia. But she was discovered, and when she refused to marry Trdat was put to death with many of her fellow nuns.

The deaths of Rhipsimé, her abbess Gaiané, and their companions are part of the oldest core of tradition in the *History* of Agathangelos, for the precise anniversaries of their deaths and the sites of their cult at Ejmiatsin are carefully recorded. One of the most important features of this *History* is the linking of Gregory with this holy site. For according to Agathangelos, following the nuns' death torments befell the court and the king was partially transformed into a wild boar. Trdat's sister was told in a vision that only Gregory could cure her brother. So he is discovered, still alive in his dungeon; at his intercession the tormented king is cured and with his entourage accepts Christianity.

Here follows a long theological document, purporting to be a sixty-day sermon preached by Gregory to the Armenian court—the so-called "Teaching of Saint Gregory." The third part of Agathangelos' *History* is an account of Gregory's missionary activity in Armenia; his consecration as the first bishop of Armenia back in Caesarea; his destruction of the pagan temples in Armenia, on the sites of which Christian churches are built; his baptism of the Armenian people (it is from the early Christian description of baptism as "illumination" that Gregory derives his title as "Illuminator"); his travels throughout the country establishing churches and bishoprics; his journey to Rome with king Trdat to greet the newly converted emperor Constantine; his final

eremitical withdrawal from the world, to be succeeded as primate of Armenia by his son.

The various parts of Agathangelos' *History* do not all have a common origin, and the work is certainly not that of an eye-witness, as "Agathangelos" would have us suppose. So it may be worthwhile to examine the various parts separately before venturing any general conclusions.

The political events from the Sasanian revolution in 224 to the conversion of Trdat nearly one hundred years later have been compressed by Agathangelos into the span of a single generation. He is therefore no reliable guide to the very complicated history of this period. Furthermore, he completely ignores the division of Armenia into Eastern and Western spheres of influence. Like other Armenian historians of succeeding centuries, he views Armenia as a monolithic unity, which not merely simplifies but greatly distorts historical reality. [For an exposition of the problems involved and a discussion of Armenian and foreign evidence regarding this period, see C. Toumanoff, "The Third-century Armenian Arsacids; a Chronological and Genealogical Commentary," *Revue des études arméniennes*, N.S. 6 (1969), pp. 233-281.] As for the life of Gregory, the two major recensions of Agathangelos differ greatly in the details. (These recensions are conveniently known as the *A* cycle for those texts which depend on the extant Armenian and the *V* cycle for those texts which derive from the lost Armenian version and the later elaborations thereto.) It is also noteworthy that other early Armenian writers say little or nothing about him. The main point that is common to all the Armenian sources is that he was consecrated bishop in Caesarea—where his successors as primate of Armenia also had to go for consecration through most of the fourth century. A reference in one of the Greek witnesses to the *V* cycle to a council of twenty bishops being held at Caesarea at the time of Gregory's consecration enables us to place that event in A.D. 314 [See P. Ananian, "La data e le circostanze della consecrazione di S. Gregorio Illuminatore," *Le Muséon*, 84 (1961), pp. 43-73, 319-360]. But there is no corroborating evidence outside Armenian tradition for the martyrdom of the nuns at Ejmiatsin. The plausible suggestion that this was connected with Maximin's persecutions in Armenia in A.D. 311-312, as described in Eusebius' *Church History*, IX viii 2, remains unconfirmed. [See P. Peeters, "S. Grégoire

l'Illuminateur dans le calendrier lapidaire de Naples," *Analecta Bollandiana* 60 (1942), pp. 91-130, esp. 105-106.]

The long account of Gregory's tortures that preceded his imprisonment is in the standard tradition of Eastern Christian hagiography. More particularly interesting are some parallels with the Acts of the early Syrian martyrs at Edessa. The influence of Syrian traditions is also evident elsewhere in Agathangelos, especially in the *Teaching* and in the descriptions of baptism. [For the latter, see G. Winkler, "The Original Meaning of the Prebaptismal Anointing and its Implications: A Study of the Armenian, Syriac and Greek terminology for the Oil," *Worship*, 52 (1978), pp. 24-45.] The edicts of king Trdat against the Christians are also no more historical than other regular features of standard hagiographical procedure. But the activities of Gregory after his release from the dungeon are of greater relevance to the study of fourth-century Armenia. Although it is true that much of Gregory's missionary work as described by Agathangelos has been based on the account of Mashtots' activity in the early fifth century as described by Koriun, nonetheless some important points do emerge. [A table of the major borrowings may be found in the Armenian edition of 1909, Appendix, pp. 14-15; see also the commentary to the translation by R. W. Thomson.]

In the first place, Agathangelos is our primary source for what little we know about the cults of pre-Christian Armenia. Although the historians of classical antiquity were familiar with the Armenians' devotion to Anahita, and Strabo gives details of her temple at Erez (*Geography*, XI 14. 16), only in Agathangelos do we find any general account of Armenian paganism. This is, however, limited to the enumeration of various sites and the deities worshipped there. By the time this *History* was composed, details of the actual cultic practices had been suppressed and forgotten. Hence the account of the worship offered to Anahit by Trdat (in which Gregory refused to participate) bears no relation to Strabo's account but is rather a reminiscence of certain rituals described in the Books of Maccabees.

Agathangelos lists seven main shrine-centers and names eight deities. These were all discussed in some detail long ago by H. Gelzer ["Zur armenischen Götterlehre," *Berichte der königlichen sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, 48 (1896), pp. 99-148]. Here we may merely stress the significance of the site at Ashtishat, where Gregory

destroyed the temples of Vahagn, Anahit, and Astlik and sanctified the site for Christianity by building the first church in Armenia. For Ashtishat, to the west of Lake Van, remained the see of the Armenian primates until after the division of the country in 387. Although Agathangelos is primarily concerned to associate Gregory the Illuminator with Ejmiatsin, that site was not the original center of the Armenian church. His *History* reflects the situation of a later period when the Armenian patriarchs did reside in N.E. Armenia.

On the other hand, from the earliest Christian time in Armenia Ejmiatsin had clearly been a holy shrine. The actual location of the principal cathedral and the churches nearby dedicated to the martyred saints Rhipsimé and Gaiané is of great significance to Agathangelos. He explains them as the sites where the saints' bodies were to be buried. These were revealed to Gregory in a divine vision. The superhuman figure who appeared in this vision was later associated with Christ. But the actual name Ejmiatsin (meaning "the Only-begotten descended") did not come into use until the 14th century. [For the site, the churches, and this vision, see A. Khatchatrian, *L'architecture arménienne du IV<sup>e</sup> au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Bibliothèque des Cahiers Archéologiques, 7), Paris, 1971, esp. pp. 67-92.]

Although Agathangelos glosses over the significance of Ashtishat as the first residence of the bishops of Armenia, he does draw attention to several interesting features of the early Armenian church. King Trdat may have joined Gregory in some of his idol-smashing journeys, but Agathangelos makes it quite clear that the estates belonging to the pagan temples and their treasures were devoted to the use of the church—namely, the family of Gregory himself, the Pahlavunik'. [For such temple estates in pagan Armenia, see A. G. Perikhanian, *Khramovye ob'edinenija Maloi Azii i Armenii*, Moscow, 1959.] Whatever the historicity of Agathangelos' account, it emerges from other writers also that the primates of Armenia controlled lands in numerous parts of the country and that the family of the Pahlavunik' was not merely a spiritual force but a very significant political one as well. [See in this regard, H. Gelzer, "Die Anfänge der armenischen Kirche," *Berichte der königlichen sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, 47 (1895), pp. 109-174.] Furthermore, the succession to the primate's see was a prerogative of the family of Gregory. Not only was he succeeded by his two sons—the younger, unmarried one, first—but during the fourth century when the patriarchal

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see fell vacant, only if no suitable descendant of Gregory could be found did the king and nobles meet to elect a successor. From the earliest period the supreme spiritual leader of the Armenian church also played a very important role in the social and political life of his country. The integration of the church into the social fabric is reflected in the organization of Armenian bishoprics, which generally followed the pattern of landed noble families that were the dominant feature of Armenian society. The organization of bishoprics in the leading cities that pertained in the Roman empire, East and West, did not pertain in Armenia.

Another interesting feature of the *History* of Agathangelos is that the author of the surviving Armenian text knew nothing about his hero's death. Even by the second half of the fifth century—to which period the text as we have it may plausibly be assigned—neither Gregory's burial-place nor the date of his death were known. Only in the Syriac version, later turned into Karshuni, is the story of Gregory's life carried to a final conclusion. His death, unknown to the world, is described; then the burial of his body, which shepherds found; and finally the discovery of his relics in the time of the emperor Zeno. These developments were later fully integrated into Armenian tradition by Moses Khorenats'i.

The Syriac text of Agathangelos is important for another reason: it is the only witness (for the Karshuni is a rendering from the Syriac) in the Agathangelos cycle to the supposed missionary work in Armenia of the apostle Addai/Thaddaeus. For the Armenian redactor of the *History* as we have it (Aa), Gregory was the first Christian missionary in Armenia. But the story of Addai, adapted from the Syrian legend of the conversion of king Abgar of Edessa, took hold in Armenia after the fifth century.

The story of Gregory and Trdat as it is found in the Armenian text of Agathangelos is thus neither the first nor the final version of the traditions surrounding the conversion of Armenia to Christianity. Its great importance for later Armenian literature lies in the fact that this *History* (Aa) became the standard and authoritative account of Gregory's life, while stories and variants existing solely in the Greek and Arabic versions did not enter the mainstream of Armenian tradition. Only the elaborations found in Moses Khorenats'i received equal "canonical" status—but then he claimed merely to be following Agathangelos.



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Although the contents of Agathangelos' *History* have diverse origins, there is a certain unity to the book, one of style rather than original composition, which reflects the literary interests of fifth-century Armenian scholars. As one would expect from the ecclesiastical nature of most early Armenian writing, the influence of biblical terminology and imagery is all-pervasive. Here the influence of the Books of Maccabees is notable, particularly in the early section describing the wars between king Khosrov and Sasanian Iran.

The wide theological learning of the author of this *History* is also evident from the complex document known as the *Teaching of Saint Gregory*—longer than the rest of the book taken together—which is omitted from all the versions save for very brief extracts. Though the model for this treatise was not originally Armenian [see M. van Esbroeck, "Le résumé syriaque de l'Agathange et sa portée pour l'histoire du développement de la légende," *Handes Amsorya*, 90 (1976), col. 493-510, esp. 507-510], the author of the surviving expanded text was clearly familiar with many patristic sources. Most evident are the *Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem, the *Hexaemeron* of Basil of Caesarea, numerous biblical commentaries of John Chrysostom, and homilies of Ephrem Syrus—works all translated at an early date from Greek and Syriac into Armenian. [On this, see further the Introduction and Commentary in R. W. Thomson, *The Teaching of Saint Gregory: An Early Armenian Catechism* (Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies, 3), Cambridge, Mass., 1970.]

Furthermore, the general stock-in-trade of the hagiographer is much in evidence in this *History*. Certain standard motifs abound, such as the insistence on the authority of an eyewitness, the presence of scribes to record what was said and done, the issuing of edicts against the Christians, the insensibility of martyrs to their torments, the types of tortures employed, the miraculous destructions of pagan temples. [For a fuller discussion, see the Introduction and Commentary in the English translation by R. W. Thomson.]

Among the direct sources for the Armenian text of Agathangelos, the numerous borrowings from Koriun are especially noticeable. As noted above, the parallels and borrowings occur in the last part of the *History*, where Gregory's activity after his rescue from the dungeon is described. The narrative here is less coherent than in the early part, and the divergences from the Armenian in the Greek and Arabic versions are

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greater. The traditions surrounding this aspect of Gregory's work were thus more fluid, and the Armenian redactor had no qualms about borrowing passages from the life of another Armenian missionary—Masht'ots', the inventor of the Armenian alphabet—and applying them to his own hero. But we cannot merely assume that "Agathangelos" was at a loss for words and copied someone else without a thought. The impression that he wished to convey is that Gregory was not only the first evangelist and bishop in Armenia, but that he was also responsible for preaching throughout the whole country, establishing churches everywhere, and founding hundreds of bishoprics.

So the version of Gregory's life that was enshrined in the *History* of Agathangelos is a grave distortion of historical reality, quite apart from legendary accretions. The center of the early Armenian church was at Ashtishat, not Ejmiatsin or the nearby capital of Vagharshapat. The conversion of the country was a slow process that met with much opposition; it was not accomplished by Gregory alone, nor were four million Armenians baptised in one week (Aa §835). This *History* is not the work of an eye-witness; it could not have been written before the second half of the fifth century, or after the end of the sixth, when traditions about Gregory's burial had gained credence.

The *History* of Agathangelos, then, reflects the ecclesiastical interests of the leaders of the Armenian church when they were facing two major problems. The abolition of the monarchy in 428 had left the Armenians with no central organization that would counter the endemic rivalry of the princely houses. It was the church, in the person of the successors to Saint Gregory, who filled that gap and provided a focus for national rather than partisan interests. Furthermore, the country had been divided since 387 into two spheres: the larger, Eastern sector was under Iranian suzerainty, where religious hostilities fanned revolt; the smaller, Western sector was under Roman suzerainty, where integration into the imperial system fanned social and political unrest. It was therefore important that the patriarchs should be seen as temporal leaders of the nation, not merely as spiritual ones divorced from other aspects of Armenian life, and also as leaders of all Armenians on both sides of the border. If the *History* of Agathangelos became for later generations the authoritative account of Armenia's conversion because it emphasized the role of the first Armenian bishop acting in concert with the king, we should not be surprised. For 1,500 years the Armenian patriarchs have

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faced a similar problem: they have been at once the spiritual and secular leaders, with all the social tensions that this dual role implies; and they have sought the allegiance of all Armenians, with all the political tensions that follow from the scattering of their people among various, often mutually hostile, regimes.

The actual author of the *History* attributed to "Agathangelos" is unknown, and the name itself—"good messenger"—is remarkably suspicious, though of course most appropriate for the recorder of the coming of the good word to Armenia. In the Preface to the *History* (Aa §12) Agathangelos claims to be a Roman scribe, summoned to Trdat's court in order to set in writing an authoritative account of that king's life and works. Presumably he was summoned in anticipation (!), for he claims to have seen with his own eyes the persons involved, the spiritual deeds, and the illuminating teaching. But as noted above, the theme of an eye-witness is a standard hagiographical one. And the Preface, where Agathangelos gives a résumé of his *History*, does not predate that composition, which was probably put into its present form at least 150 years after the events it describes.

More interesting than this fictitious claim, however, is the attribution to "Agathangelos the scribe" of an inscription giving in Greek the lengths of reigns of the Armenian and Parthian rulers. This supposed inscription, allegedly found in the ruins of the palace of king Sanatruk at Mtsum, is included in an undated document known as the "Primary History," attributed to a certain Mar Abas Catina. The *Primary History* was later added as a preface to the seventh-century *History of Heraclius*, which is attributed to Sebeos. Later, Moses Khorenats'i expanded on it, claiming "Mar Abas Catina" as an authoritative source for the earliest history of Armenia. [For a translation of the *Primary History*, see the Appendix to R. W. Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i, History of the Armenians* (Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies, 4), Cambridge, Mass., 1978.] But the list of kings has nothing to do with Gregory or Trdat's conversion. Its attribution to "Agathangelos" is but a reflection of the latter's fame as a reliable "scribe," which stems from the self-serving Preface to the *History*.

One witness to the Greek translation of the Armenian text (Florence, Laurentianus, Plut. VII cod. gr. 25, of the 12th century) has inserted between the Preface and the *History* proper the story of

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Artashir's revolt against the Arsacid Artaban. This Greek text is derived from a lost Armenian version of the Pahlavi romance, *Karnamak-i Artashir-i Papakan*, and does not go back to the time of the translation of the Greek version from the Armenian text. There is no suggestion in Armenian tradition that the episode was ever associated with the Armenian *History* of Agathangelos. [For this romance, see Th. Noldeke, "Geschichte des Artashesir i Papakan," *Beiträge zur Kunde der indogermanischen Sprachen*, 4 (1878), pp. 22-69.]

### The Armenian Text (*Aa*)

The earliest manuscript with a full text of Agathangelos dates from the end of the 12th century, but several earlier fragments have been found. The longest is a palimpsest in the Mechitarist library at Vienna, no. 56, edited by G. Galemk'earian, "Agat'angelosi krknagir bnagirë," *Huscharizan*, Vienna, 1911, pp. 67-160. The Armenian text was first printed in 1709 at Constantinople. Since then many editions have appeared, but the only critical text is that of Tiflis, 1909, edited by G. Ter-Mkrtch'ean and St. Kanayants', *Agat'angelay Patmut'iwn Hayots'*. The text without the apparatus was reprinted at Tiflis in 1914 in the Lukasean library. A photographic reprint of that 1914 text (excluding the *Teaching of Gregory*) is included in the English translation and commentary by R. W. Thomson, Albany, 1976.

### Translations

*Italian*: Venice, 1843, by the Mechitarist Fathers, revised by N. Tommaseo.

*French*: V. Langlois, *Collection des historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie*, vol. 1, Paris, 1867.

*English*: R. W. Thomson, *Agathangelos, History of the Armenians*, Albany, 1976, the only translation into any language of the critical Armenian text. (The work by S. C. Malan, *The Life and Times of S. Gregory the Illuminator*, London, 1868, is not a translation of the Armenian text *Aa* but of a modern compilation of the story by Matt'eos Ewdokiats'i, *Vark' srboyn Grigori Lusaworch'in* [Life of St. Gregory the Illuminator], Venice, 1749.)

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None of these translations includes the long section (§§259-715 of the Armenian) known as the *Teaching*. For that, see R. W. Thomson, *The Teaching of Saint Gregory: An Early Armenian Catechism* (Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies, 3), Cambridge, Mass., 1970.

### Other texts in the A cycle

*Greek*: *La version grecque ancienne du livre arménien d'Agathange*, édition critique par G. Lafontaine (Publications de l'Institut orientaliste de Louvain, 7), Louvain, 1973. It has full references to the MSS and to earlier editions, plus a detailed study of the style and date of this early translation.

*Arabic*: *Sinai*, ar. 395, published by A. Ter-Łevondyan, *Agat'angelosi khmbagrut'yunə*, Erevan, 1968. This translation was made from the Greek and not directly from the Armenian.

### Texts in the V cycle

*Greek*: *Escorial*, gr. X.111.6, published by G. Garitte, *Documents pour l'étude du livre d'Agathange* (Studi e Testi, 127), Vatican 1946.

*Ochrid*, 4, published by G. Garitte, "La vie grecque inédite de saint Grégoire d'Arménie," *Analecta Boliandiana*, 83 (1965), pp. 233-290.

*Arabic*: *Sinai*, ar. 460, published by N. Marr, "Kreshchenie Armjan, Gruzin', Abkhazov'i Alanov' sviatym' Grigoriem'," in *Zapiski Vostochnago Otdelenija Imperatorskago Russkago Arkheologicheskago Obshchestva*, 16 (1905), pp. 63-211. Translation in Garitte, *Documents*.

*Sinai*, ar. 455, published by A. Ter-Łevondyan, "Agat'angelosi arabakan khmbagrut'yan norahayt bnagirə," *Patmabanasirakan Handes*, 60 (1973, pt. 1), pp. 209-228.

*Syriac*: *Damascus*, Orthodox Patriarchate 12/17 and 12/18, published by M. van Esbroeck, "Le résumé syriaque de l'Agathange," *Analecta Bollandiana*, 95 (1977), pp. 291-358.

*Karshuni*: *Jerusalem*, St. Mark's monastery, 38 (now in the Orthodox Patriarchate, *Damascus*), published by M. van Esbroeck, "Un nouveau témoin du livre d'Agathange," *Revue des études arméniennes*, N.S. 8 (1971), pp. 13-167.

In addition to the various works already cited in the text above the following are also of value for the study of Agathangelos' *History*:

- G. V. Abgaryan, *Sebeosi Patmu'yunə ev Ananuni Arełtsvatsə*, Erevan, 1965 (for the inscription attributed to Agathangelos).
- M. Avdalbegyan, *Hay Gelarvestakan Ardzaki Skzbnvorumə*, Erevan, 1971 (for the general hagiographical nature of this and other early Armenian historical texts).
- A. Carrière, *Les huit sanctuaires de l'Arménie payenne*, Paris, 1899.
- A. von Gutschmid, "Agathangelos," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 31 (1877), pp. 1-60; reprinted in *Kleine Schriften*, ed. F. Rühl, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1892), pp. 339-420.
- A. Meillet, "Remarques sur le texte de l'historien arménien Agathange," *Journal asiatique*, 10th series, 16 (1910), pp. 457-481.
- P. M. Muradyan, "Agat'angelosi Patmut'yan hnagoyn patarikner," *Lraber*, 1971, no. 12, pp. 37-48 (for fragments of the text predating the extant manuscripts).
- B. V. Sargisean, *Agat'angelos ew iwr bazmakarean Galtnik'n*, Venice, 1890.
- M. van Esbroeck, "Témoignages littéraires sur les sépultures de S. Grégoire l'Illuminateur," *Analecta Bollandiana*, 89 (1971), pp. 387-418.
- N. G. Garsoïan, "The Iranian Substratum of the 'Agat'angelos' Cycle," in *East of Byzantium*, ed. N. G. Garsoïan, T. F. Mathews, R. W. Thomson. Washington, D.C., 1982, pp. 151-174.
- M. van Esbroeck, "Saint Grégoire d'Arménie et sa Didascalie," *Le Muséon* 102 [1989], pp. 131-145.
- G. Winkler, "Our Present Knowledge of the History of Agat'angelos and its Oriental Versions," *Revue des études arméniennes* 14 [1980], pp. 125-141.